

TPM QUARTERLY

FACULTY OF TECHNOLOGY, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

THREE UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATE
IN A NEW CENTRE FOR ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Philosophy with a practical slant



"Ethics should be of practical use," says Jeroen van den Hoven, Professor of Ethics and Technology at the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management. This is also the basic principle of the new '3TU. Centre for Ethics and Technology', at which Van den Hoven is the Director of Research. The centre was officially opened on 24 January by Pieter Winsemius, the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. "We don't aim to ponder the state of the nation from an armchair," is how Van den Hoven describes the centre's plans.

3TU • Centre for Ethics and Technology

The new centre, financed by the universities of technology based in Delft, Eindhoven and Twente, focuses on moral issues involved in the design, use and regulation of technology. Particular attention is devoted to ICT, biomedical technology, nanotechnology and sustainable energy. "We're going to conduct ethics research that relates to the real world and not just to theoretical issues. We want to deliver a way of looking at things that will benefit organisations, insights that they can't expect from other disciplines."

As one example Van den Hoven cites the problem of privacy in relation to new ICT technology. "A good electronic file on a child can help to prevent child abuse or even deaths. Technically speaking we can link up the databases of child-oriented organisations in all sorts of ways. But is this something we want to do? We simultaneously feel sceptical about constructing and recording someone's identity in this way. What precisely do you put in the file and who is allowed to view it?" So ethical considerations are of great importance to the design of such systems for identity management. Ethics also helps to define a responsible architecture for such a system. As Van den Hoven explains, "Engineering philosophers look for a good balance between two societal positions: how can you make optimum use of the functionality of a technological invention without encountering problems with the disadvantages?"

A separate status

The 35 academics now working at the new Centre for Ethics are philosophers from the departments at Delft, Eindhoven and Twente. Their work was recently rated by an international visitation committee of the VSNU (the Association of Universities in the Netherlands) as 'excellent'. Indeed, the committee felt that the Netherlands is a model in the field of ethics and technology. This verdict provided the direct impetus for the creation of the new centre, the sixth centre of excellence to be jointly set up by the universities of technology. Each university has provided half a million euros. The Centre for Ethics has a slightly different status to the other five centres because it is not funded from the 50 million euros (mostly state-provided) that has been set aside for the centres of excellence. This is because the Centre for Ethics was included in the plans at a later stage, thanks in part to the highly positive visitation report. The ethicists will however strive to coordinate their research subjects with the specialties of the other five centres: ICT, biomedical technology, nanotechnology, sustainable energy and materials engineering. Van den Hoven does not see the separate status and the subsidiary role as a problem and says, "First you have science and engineering, and then you

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A high-ranking visit

At the end of January a Chinese delegation from Tsinghua University visited the Faculty of TPM. Tsinghua University, with 27,000 students and a staff of 7,000, is one of the most famous and exclusive universities in China. During a meeting in 2005, its President Gu Binglin and the President of the Executive Board Hans van Luijk agreed that the two universities would increase and intensify their cooperation. A TPM task force is to prepare an exchange programme between the Faculty and Tsinghua. This working group will also study the possibilities for a double or dual degree programme for the Master's in Management of Technology.

Inaugural lectures

Friday 7 September 2007, Alexander Verbraeck: chair of Systems and Simulation, Systems Engineering research group. Friday 21 September 2007, Helen Stout: chair of Law and Infrastructures, Law research group. Wednesday 26 September 2007, Bent Flyvbjerg: chair of Management of Large Infrastructure Projects, Transport Policy and Logistics Organisation research group.

IBM Faculty Award

This year the prestigious IBM Faculty Award is being awarded to Marc Zegveld. The aim of this IBM prize is to promote the transmission of scientific knowledge to society in general. The two prizes being awarded in the Netherlands relate to the application of new knowledge within chip technology and a new business method that facilitates the management of innovation.

Maarten Kroesen

Maarten Kroesen, the first student to graduate in the Honours Track at SEPAM, started work as a PhD student at the TLO research group at the start of December 2006. The theme of his doctoral research, which continues the line of his graduation project, is noise nuisance caused by aircraft. "More specifically, I'm focusing on 'non-acoustic factors' such as distrust of noise-regulation authorities, uncertainty about future developments and worries about the effects of noise on health. These are factors that, apart from the noise itself, also determine the perception level of noise nuisance. These psychosocial factors provide possibilities, alongside measures for noise mitigation and reduction, for reducing noise nuisance." The challenge involved in his doctoral research is to shape and assess policy options that make effective use of these possibilities.

SEPAM opens up

Until now the Master's in SEPAM (Systems Engineering, Policy Analysis & Management) was open only to students who had completed a multidisciplinary engineering Bachelor's programme. From the coming academic year onwards SEPAM will now also be open to Bachelor graduates of monodisciplinary engineering degree programmes if they have also attended the SEPAM bridging minor at the Faculty of TPM. This will bring SEPAM more into line with the original concept of the Bachelor's-Master's structure: the coordination of various (European) education systems.

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Farewell to Hugo Priemus

Hugo Priemus will be taking his leave on 29 June. At 9.30 am a workshop will start in the Great Hall of the Faculty of Architecture and at around 2.30 pm the event will transfer to the auditorium of the Aula for the valedictory lecture. The full programme is still secret. Enter this date in your diary now - you will receive an invitation in due course.

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reflect on the resulting issues." He also adds that he does not require any laboratories and expensive experimental equipment. On the other hand, the philosophers will of course be incorporating their own specialities in their work. To give one example, Delft research funding applications that were recently awarded one million euros by the NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) have been incorporated in the work of the new centre. This involves research into the assignment of responsibility in complex R&D projects and research into the ethics of neurotechnology. Other new projects and grant applications will be aimed at a collaboration between researchers in the Arts, the Sciences and social and behavioural sciences. "We ask questions such as: how do users deal with technology? What effect does an invention have in practice? In what ways can a new technology be useful? We will also take a proactive approach and make sure that ethics are involved in the design process at an early stage," says Van den Hoven.

Optimum conditions for collaboration

The Director of Research and the secretariat of the Centre for Ethics are being assigned a base in Campus Den Haag at Lange Voorhout 44, but the research will be conducted at the three universities. The centre is starting with six PhD students, paid for from the 1 million euros provided by the three universities. These will be supplemented by four further PhD or post-doctoral researchers funded from the recently acquired NWO grant. Van den Hoven gives an enthusiastic account of the possibilities created by the new alliance. "It will be even easier than it previously was to create synergy between the three departments. It is also easier to promote collaboration between, say, philosophers and nanotechnologists. The conditions for jointly setting up a project are optimal. Moreover, we have established a strong profile in the broader community. We are an interesting partner for the NWO, for European research consortiums and for an organisation such as the Rathenau Institute."

The centre will not only engage in research, but is also helping to set up an international PhD school in the field of ethics. To this end the Dutch ethicists are cooperating closely with leading ethics institutes in Australia, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the United States. A one-year Master's degree programme that prepares for a doctoral research project will be set up in Twente. During this course the budding PhD students can visit the foreign alliance partners and make a well-considered choice of theme.

TPM focus

What is the connection between the new Centre for Ethics and the Faculty of TPM? As Van den Hoven explains, "The focus is a real

TPM focus. The research concentrates mainly on infrastructures, on socio-technical systems, in design-oriented, it combines the hard and soft aspects of engineering, considers issues from the multi-actor perspective and tries to envision the future. In view of the many overlaps we will often be contacting our colleagues at the faculty. What's more, if you want to talk about the ethical aspects of reality then you first

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have to gain a good picture of this reality. In this sense we are dependent on the more descriptive and elucidatory disciplines. By the same token, these disciplines realise that when it comes to decision and policy-making it is important to consider not only what one can do but what one should do. So we complement each other really well."

This brings us back to our starting point: ethics should be useful. Van den Hoven regards this as an important motor for the coming years. And alongside this, gaining international recognition for the ethics of engineering. "At the end of the day I want people in the technology and engineering community to say 'this is useful to us'. And I want the theoretical ethicists, who have just come down from their ivory tower, to say 'interesting things are happening here. This is interesting ethics.'"

QUYNH CHI TRINH

Multiple degree in Delft and Paris

Quynh Chi Trinh from Vietnam has almost completed the Master's degree programme 'Economics and Management of Network Industries' (EMIN) at the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management. Towards the end of the year she will be going to Paris to complete her multiple degree. The Faculty of TPM has developed this two-year Master's programme in collaboration with Université Paris-Sud 11 and Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid; it is a component of Erasmus Mundus, the European Union's prestigious programme for the promotion of learning.



She is full of motivation for her studies. She tells us that she is studying hard in this difficult Master's programme and that her main interest is in environmental and energy projects; she also aims to be a good manager. "The subject has equipped me with the knowledge I need to realise my dream in Vietnam," says Quynh Chi Trinh. She adds, "I believe that Holland is the ideal country for foreign students. People are nice and friendly". Right from the very first day she received enthusiastic help from her fellow students and the tutors, so she's not lonely here. Indeed, she sounds very happy.

She feels honoured to have received this opportunity to have taken part in the EMIN programme. "And I believe in the future, when I am back in Vietnam, I will be proud that I used to be an EMIN student!," says Quynh Chi Trinh.